

MS in Sustainability Management – Curricular Review – DE&I Efforts

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Friday, Jul 2, 7:49 AM

Update: SUMA Curriculum and DE&I

Steve, I am updating you after yesterday's meeting of the SUMA curricular committee, in which we discussed the integration of equity in the curriculum. Here's what the committee is planning:

1. Request instructors' permission to share their responses to the questions about equity and their courses with all of the faculty. These were the questions we posed in late fall of 2020.
2. Invite instructors to join groups of three instructors plus one volunteer student or alum to review the syllabi of the instructors in the respective groups and determine ways to better integrate equity. We will set these groups, matching instructors by discipline and trying to include at least one with some knowledge of equity, if possible.

We're drafting the invitations to faculty, students, and alumni, which I'll share with you. I'm hoping that we'll have some tangible results some time in the fall.

George

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Thursday, July 15, 2021

Message to Invite Spring and Fall faculty to join groups of three instructors plus one volunteer student or alum to review the syllabi in the respective groups and determine ways to better integrate equity.

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of our Curricular Committee, I would like to thank you for your detailed and thoughtful responses to the survey on equity and diversity in your course content conducted in the spring. Inspired by the variety of relevant issues raised by your responses, we are undertaking a broader curriculum review in the Sustainability Management program in order to better integrate equity and address environmental justice concerns throughout the curriculum, and to share peer knowledge.

Specific additions or changes across the aspects with which any course operates, including readings/reading discussions, field trips, case studies, guest lecturers/discussants of student work, project topics, and partnerships; and That definitions of equity and inclusion are dependent upon context. American-raised students may reflect on the concepts relative to a national experience of race and racial structures; whereas International students will want to include the legacy of colonialism. Likewise, each discipline will have its own history of racial assumptions and underpinnings. An obvious example is the idea of the "primitive" in anthropology. Including in your considerations, these larger histories may lead to unexpected and relevant insights.

To ensure that the review is robust, faculty will discuss these considerations in small groups of three instructors, plus a volunteer student or alum. We will organize the groups so that they include faculty who teach related courses.

As the first step in this process, if you have not done so already, I would like to request your permission to share your responses to the questions about equity and your respective courses, which we had posed to you late in the fall semester of 2020. We expect that those responses will help all faculty to learn from each others' experiences and will serve as a basis of fruitful discussions within the small groups. Please indicate your permission by responding to this email by Monday, July 19. If you already replied to our previous email, there is no additional action required from you in the meantime.

All the best,
SUMA Curricular Committee

Thursday, July 22, 2021

Message sent to Faculty regarding the curriculum review to integrate equity and end environmental justice concerns in the curriculum

Dear Faculty,

On behalf of our Curricular Committee, I would like to inform you of the curricular review that we are undertaking in the Sustainability Management program in order to better integrate equity and end environmental justice concerns in the curriculum. As part of the review, we will be asking all instructors to consider the following.

1. Specific additions or changes across the aspects with which any course operates, including readings/reading discussions, field trips, case studies, guest lecturers/discussants of student work, project topics, and partnerships; and
2. That definitions of equity and inclusion are dependent upon context. American-raised students may reflect on the concepts relative to a national experience of race and racial structures; whereas International students will want to include the legacy of colonialism. Likewise, each discipline will have its own history of racial assumptions and underpinnings. An obvious example is the idea of the "primitive" in anthropology. Including in your considerations, these larger histories may lead to unexpected and relevant insights.

To ensure that the review is robust, faculty will discuss these considerations in small groups of three instructors, plus a volunteer student or alum. We will organize the groups so that they include faculty who teach related courses.

As the first step in this process, we would like to ask you to **share your responses to the below items** about equity and your respective courses. Please indicate your permission to share your responses with the above-mentioned small groups. We hope to hear back from you by Thursday, July 29th.

- 1) Whether the issues or concepts on which your courses are based are affected by racism;
- 2) Whether the examples and readings that you use in your courses account for this issue; and
- 3) What changes to the course design, readings, and other assignments could help students better manage for improved environmental and social outcomes, especially in the United States, where there is heightened concern about the links among environmental harm, racism, and equity.

We kindly ask that you respond to these questions, even if you believe that the courses you teach are unrelated to these issues; below you can find a summary of the responses we received for courses offered in the spring.

Summary of responses to question one (Are the issues or concepts on which

your courses are based are affected by racism?):

Most faculty members articulated that their course material is either tangentially or directly affected by racism. There seem to be two main groups of responses for this question--instructors who find that their material is related to racism and feel that they should include discussion of this overlap, and instructors who deem the discussion of racism absolutely essential to their material. A few faculty members who teach strictly quantitative courses found it more difficult to find overlap with their course material. A similar challenge arose in a few other more technically-focused courses--is it necessary to address how racism relates to a topic if the purpose of the course is strictly to teach technical knowledge of the topic, and if so, how should this be included?

Some of the most frequently mentioned terms and topics that seem to represent the overlap of sustainability and racism include: environmental justice, bias and prejudice in the workplace, equity between developing and developed countries, diversity in professional fields and the workplace, equity in the supply chain, access to parks and green spaces in cities, access to environmental education and resources like recycling services (ability to be “green”), colonialism and imperialism, and effects of urban policy on marginalized groups.

Summary of responses to question two (Do the examples and readings that you use in your courses account for this issue?):

Faculty members who agreed that issues discussed in their courses are affected by racism generally shared that their course material accounts for the issue. Similar to responses to question one, some instructors described that they frame their course material in a way that addresses racism and inequality, while others seem to more explicitly include material that directly discusses how race intersects with their course material. Again, only a couple of instructors did not include any material of this kind due to the technical nature of their courses. Some instructors have dedicated a module of their course or class session(s) to race-related issues, while others choose to spread discussion more evenly throughout.

The main ways in which instructors account for the discussion of racism in their courses seem to be readings, guest speakers, and assignments that require students to think critically about the course material in relation to race or social justice.

Summary of responses to question three (What changes to the course design, readings, and other assignments could help students better manage for improved environmental and social outcomes, especially in the United States, where there is heightened concern about the links among environmental harm, racism, and equity.):

Almost all instructors are willing and eager to make changes to their course design to better address race (e.g. adding or changing assignments, replacing readings, including new class sessions or modules). Some have outlined in their responses specific articles, assignments, or guest speakers they'd like to include to make these changes, while others have suggested more general ideas.

Ideas for improving courses to better address the intersection of sustainability and racism include adding readings that directly address the issue, highlighting areas of the course material that are more relevant to racial justice, modifying assignments in a way that requires students to consider equity and inclusion, and inviting guest speakers. One faculty member suggested that pairing up instructors to review each other's course material for its ability to address these issues could be helpful.

[SUMA DE&I page](#) on the program's website, including relevant materials, resources, and the [SUMA audit report](#).

Best,
Mariví

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Friday, September 10, 2021

Message sent to invite current students and alumni to volunteer

Dear SUMA Students and Alumni:

Our program is undertaking a curricular review with the purpose of better integrating equity concerns in our courses. We are seeking student and alumni volunteers, who will work alongside small groups of faculty in conducting this review.

The faculty in these small groups will seek opportunities to enrich their course syllabi by identifying pertinent topics associated with equity and by updating reading lists and course assignments. Volunteers will advise the faculty by participating in 2-3 meetings over the course of the fall semester. The faculty will rely on the input of their faculty colleagues and the student and alumni volunteers in deciding if and how to revise their courses.

This review is important because sustainability managers must account for equity if they are to help create sustainable organizations and communities. The review, too, represents an important recommendation of the program's recent diversity, equity and inclusion audit.

Students and alumni may indicate their interest in volunteering for this effort by contacting Mariví Perdomo-Caba (mp3221@columbia.edu) by **September 24, 2021**.

I look forward to your participation and to the outcomes of this initiative.

Best Regards,

Steve

Dr. Steven Cohen^[L]_[SEP]

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Friday September 24, 2021

Message sent to Faculty and volunteer current students and alumni

Dear All,

Following up on our previous email about the SUMA DE&I curriculum review, we have distributed you into groups of three or four faculty and one or two volunteer current students and alumni. Your team is listed below.

[Team distribution by curriculum area and topic – Faculty, Current Students, Alumni]

We kindly ask the faculty member listed first to take the lead in scheduling the meeting and reaching out to the program with the meeting notes by Friday, October 15th. Suggested agenda and note structure attached. Each group should meet for 90 minutes to discuss ways to integrate equity concerns in their courses.

Next steps

1. Schedule a 90-minute meeting. (Tools: Email, Google Calendar, Doodle, Meetings.io, Coda.io)
2. Meet and discuss ways you can integrate equity concerns in your course.
3. Share meeting notes with the program. Draft notes attached.

Agenda

Group Introductions - 10 minutes - (All)

Course Descriptions - 20 minutes (Instructors)

Syllabi Review (faculty can share syllabi in advance) - 20 minutes - All

Discussion - How should each course address equity concerns - 20 minutes - (All)

Complete document: Integration of equity concerns in SUMA courses - 20 minutes - (All)

All the best,

Mariví

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[Mariví Perdomo Caba \(she/her\)](#)

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